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## Leaving legend: Retiring Mounds View coach Zig Kauls has had an unforgettable ride

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Zig Kauls, whose name already adorns the gym floor at Mounds View, will have the court dedicated to him at today's game between the Mustangs and East Ridge. (Pioneer Press: Scott Takushi)

Zig Kauls, the boys basketball coaching legend known for his on-court success and trademark green suit coat, is retiring at the end of this season, ending a 45-year run at Mounds View High School.

"I am on my fifth green blazer since the start," Kauls said with a laugh.

Kauls, 70, will have the court at the Arden Hills school dedicated in his honor today when the Mustangs play host to East Ridge in a Suburban East Conference game.

He retired from teaching math at Mounds View in 1999 but continued to coach basketball, a vocation that brought him personal joy and statewide acclaim.

He ranks third on Minnesota's all-time victories list for boys basketball coaches with a 728-350 record. Only active coaches Bob McDonald of Chisholm (975-392) and Bob Brink of Rocori (924-320) have more.

Kauls, a noted storyteller with a knack for details, sat down with the Pioneer Press recently to reflect on the game he loves and a coaching career he never saw coming.

### THE JOURNEY

"I didn't really have my life planned out for me," Kauls said. "I've got a little bit of Forrest Gump in me and figured, 'Whatever.' I think, at times, there might have been a little too much 'whatever.'"

Kauls was a three-sport star at Forest Lake and graduated in 1959. He played four years of basketball at Hamline University and graduated in 1963.

While at Hamline, he was a student teacher at Mounds View and was hired in 1962. He started hanging around the gym and then volunteered

to coach the B-squad team. When Mustangs coach **Jim Geske** left to coach Irondale, another district school that opened in 1967, Kauls was offered the Mounds View boys basketball job despite little experience.

His first state tournament berth was in 1972 when the Mustangs won the Class 2A title but lost to Class A champion St. James in the playoff championship.

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Mounds View's other state championship came in 1999 when the Mustangs won the Class 4A title.

For Kauls, coaching was an extension



Since accepting the job of boys basketball coach in 1967, Zig Kauls has taken Mounds View to 12 state tournament appearances and two state championships, in 1972 and '79, while compiling a record of 728-350. (PIONEER PRESS: SCOTT TAKUSHI)

of the classroom.

"Teaching is a big part of what I do," he said. "I have always said you try to put kids in situations where they won't look bad. Sometimes you can have bad players, but they can look good all the time as long as they don't try to do what they aren't capable of doing. You can't take a freshman kid and throw him into a college English course. That looks pretty bad, in my thinking. It's like knitting. You try to find the pieces that fit. We are always teaching, and we spend a good deal of time on fundamentals. We have a lot of coaches come in and watch what we do."

## WHY SUCCESSFUL?

Even Kauls has no idea, despite a career that has produced 12 state tournament appearances, two state championships, three Mr. Basketball winners, two hall of fame inductions and hundreds of players thankful for the experience of playing for him.

"I started out with a losing season in three of my first four seasons," he said. "I can't really put my finger on it. How can you predict something like this? I worked hard, and the kids have worked hard. For me, it has been a joy. I would open the gym for anyone to play this great game."

## WHY RETIRE?

Kauls decided to retire from coaching last fall.

"It was something I felt in my head and heart," he said. "I have the same enthusiasm for the game now, but I am a little more relaxed. I told myself that I just want this to be the kind of season where there is no attention on me. I want these kids to walk out of here knowing what is the right kind of basketball. If I look at it as my special year, then that will take away from the kids' experiences."

## THROUGH THE DECADES WITH KAULS

**1960s** - "At that time, basketball was pretty limited skill-wise. (Duluth Central's) **Terry Kunze** was the first player in the history of Minnesota basketball to go behind his back. **Jim Hastings** of Central won, and it was the era of **Dean Verdoes** and Edgerton. The taller kids were the ones that played at a high Division I level, and there weren't many of them. It would be a long time before Minnesota guards were recognized nationally. There were no summer leagues back then. Players were developed at the junior highs. It was also the era of Edina and **Bob Zender**. I remember everyone watching the Edgerton-Richfield game on their black-and-white TV's.

**1970s** - "The game opened up a bit, and they rearranged the regions in Minnesota and used letters to identify us. We were in Region F. It was not totally geographic, the regions. A new emphasis in basketball emerged with **Bobby Knight**, and the motion offense was a popular term. Indiana played

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that motion offense, and many coaches adopted that. Knight's theory was that you never screen on the ball. Open gyms started to emerge in the offseason. Instead of shooting on the barn door or sneaking through the coal chute, kids could walk in the front door of a gym. You started seeing some dominant big guys like **Mark Olberding** and **Mark Landsberger**. I had a team that went 6-14 in 1971 and then was 22-5 the next year. We were the Double-A champion and the playoff runner-up. I inherited a good team. Other pro-type players emerged like **Kevin McHale**, **Jim Petersen** and **Randy Breuer**. It was a grand time in Minnesota basketball. You couldn't play basketball in the spring. If you went out for track or played baseball, you couldn't play basketball on a spring team. The Mr. Basketball Award also started (in 1975)."

**1980s** - "Bird Island, with **Barry Wohler**, won a couple of championships, and White Bear Lake had two sensational teams that won titles (in 1984 and '85). Woodbury came in, and **Del Schiffler** took over. The popularity of basketball grew rapidly in the metro. Camps started to emerge; **Bill Musselman** had a really good one. The three-point shot came around (1988), and everyone experimented with it. Scores started to rise because of the three-point shot. I like it. It makes for some clever endings to games. You have to control, though, who shoots it and how much.

**1990s** - "Some transfers started happening. We also saw more guard play, taking over games. I thought the Sweet 16 tournament was OK. It was fun, and you did get a real champion. When it split into four classes, I was concerned. I didn't think Minnesota was deep enough in talent to have four classes. Private schools started to become very strong in the mid-1990s, and we started seeing players from foreign countries. Minneapolis North sure was fun to watch. We were in a couple of tournaments in 1990 and '91."

**2000s** - "Kids started traveling with AAU teams and got more national exposure. With the monetary investment in camps, individual workouts, there became an expectation that there would be some kind of reward. Kids' attitudes really changed, I believe. There is all this trash-talking. Before, if a kid dropped an F-bomb in a game, they would have been ejected. The physical play, especially under the basket, got really rough. The commitment to weight training really became apparent."

## WHAT'S AHEAD?

"I won't be going to the gym every night, so that will be a change," he said. "I love golf, but I am no good. I plan on traveling if I don't go broke. We will see what the 401(k) has in it. I imagine, as time goes by, I will work my way back to the gym. I can keep stats or summaries and follow the names. That would be fun."

## THE ZIG KAULS FILE

**Age:** 70

**Born:** Riga, Latvia. Immigrated to Forest Lake on Jan. 1, 1950

**Family:** Longtime girlfriend, Jackie Best; children, Mike and Jennifer. Two grandchildren, Teddy (5) and Benjamin (3).

**High school:** Forest Lake

**College:** Hamline University

**College degree:** Mathematics

**Interests:** Travel, golf, attending coaches clinics. One of his favorites was watching John Wooden conduct practices.

**Legacy:** "I am just a guy that loved the Green and White (of Mounds View). I just wanted to be a good guy, a good teacher and a good coach. I tried my best at everything I was doing."



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HE SAID IT

BY THE NUMBERS

2

State championships: 1972, '79

3

Mr. Basketball winners coached by Kauls: Steve Schlotthauer, 1986; Nick Horvath, 1999; Travis Busch, 2005

12

State tournament appearances: 1972, '73, '79, '86, '90, '91, '94, '98, '99, 2002, '03, '05

1967

Year he started at Mounds View



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